

About the Executive Summary

This executive summary provides the highlights of the most recent issue of the *Children's Mental Health Research Quarterly*, available for free at childhealthpolicy.ca. The *Quarterly* presents the best available research evidence on a variety of children's mental health topics. The BC Ministry of Children and Family Development funds the *Quarterly*.

Quarterly Team

Scientific Writer:
Christine Schwartz

Scientific Editor:
Charlotte Waddell

Research Manager:
Jen Barican

Research Assistant:
Caitlyn Andres

Production Editor:
Daphne Gray-Grant

Copy Editor:
Naomi Pauls

About the Children's Health Policy Centre

We are an interdisciplinary research group in the Faculty of Health Sciences at Simon Fraser University. Our research focuses on reducing health inequities and improving social and emotional well-being for *all* children, and on the public policies needed to reach these goals. To learn more about our work, please see childhealthpolicy.ca.



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Promoting positive behaviour in children

Most children achieve important social milestones relatively easily. But some children struggle with their behaviour — especially if skilled caregiving and supportive environments are lacking. Intervening early, before behaviour problems are entrenched, is the best approach for helping children.

Preventing childhood behaviour problems

Our systematic review of randomized controlled trials (RCTs) assessing programs aiming to prevent childhood behaviour problems identified 13 high-quality RCTs on seven programs:

- **Parenting programs:** *Triple P*, *Chicago Parent Program*, *Incredible Years* and *Parent Management Training* all promoted positive parenting strategies using brief, mostly group formats. *Chicago Parent Program*, *Incredible Years* and *Parent Management Training* all resulted in significant improvements to children's behaviour in one RCT each.
- **Child-and-maternal programs:** *Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP)* assisted disadvantaged young first-time mothers to improve their parenting using nurse home visits. One RCT showed particularly strong child behavioural outcomes, while across three RCTs, *NFP* improved parenting, child learning and mental health, and mothers' life circumstances.
- **Multicomponent programs:** *Incredible Years Enhanced* and *Fast Track* both provided an array of services, including parenting groups, home visits, parent-child sessions and child social skills training. Both programs had positive results, with particularly compelling long-term outcomes for *Fast Track*.
- **Child programs:** *Expressive Writing* had children write about their experiences with violence, but this classroom-based program had no impact on children's behaviour.

Applying these findings in BC

Based on the outcomes of these RCTs, described in detail in the [full issue](#), practitioners and policy-makers have good options for preventing child behaviour problems:

- Of the four parenting programs, the brief group-delivered versions of *Incredible Years* and *Parent Management Training* stood out, so both warrant consideration for Canadian evaluations.
- The one child-and-maternal program, *NFP*, is particularly promising due to its wide array of long-term benefits for both children and mothers. While *NFP* is intensive, and therefore more expensive initially, it results in impressive “downstream” health and social savings. An evaluation of this program is currently underway in BC and will provide important information about whether further investments are justified.
- The two multicomponent programs, *Incredible Years Enhanced* and *Fast Track*, also had positive outcomes. *Fast Track* findings were particularly impressive, so this program warrants consideration for Canadian evaluations as well.
- *Expressive Writing* is not recommended given its lack of positive outcomes.

Serious childhood behaviour problems are prevalent, affecting an estimated 2.1% of children at any given time. Unchecked, these problems lead to great distress for children as well as high family and societal costs. Effective programs to prevent child behaviour problems are therefore an essential component of any comprehensive planning for children's mental health. 🖐️